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AUTHOR Chalfant, James C.; And Others
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ABSTRACT

Teacher Assistance Teams (TAT) can support the collaboration and empowerment of teachers, address student and schoolwide problems, provide preventive intervention for at-risk students, and identify appropriate referrals to special education. This paper describes the implementation of TAT throughout the state of Arkansas over a 3-year period. During the initial planning phase, the Arkansas Department of Education consulted with educators from other states who were familiar with TAT, outlined a 3-year action plan, and committed support and resources to the plan. During Phase 2, school district superintendents agreed to specific scheduling and evaluative requirements. Phase 3 involved training of 61 pilot TAT teams. School districts with an identified overrepresentation of minority students in special education were specifically invited to the training; other districts were self-selected. During Phase 4, trained teams determined their mission and established their own operational procedures. In Phase 5, a technical assistance network was developed, including utilization of a statewide coordinator and nine consultants for students with serious emotional disturbances and featuring regular meetings of TAT team leaders. Phases 6 and 7 involved further team training after 6-9 months and 1-2 years of operation, respectively. Evaluation after 2 years indicated that teams had served 1,393 students, of whom only 13 were referred to special education for testing. Of 77 cases with available outcome data, 70% were fully or partially resolved. Network meetings were judged very beneficial. (SV)

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Presenter: James Chalfant
Co-Presenter: Margaret Pysh
Ron Miros
Ed Bradshaw
Sharon Adams
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Teacher Assistance Teams: Supporting At-Risk Students in Rural Areas

A Three Year Plan

RC018487

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TEACHER ASSISTANCE TEAMS:
Supporting At-Risk Students in Rural Areas
A Three Year Plan

Dr. James C. Chalfant
College of Education
University of Arizona
Tucson, Arizona 85721
(602) 621-3299

Dr. Margaret V. Pysh
College of Education
University of Arizona
Tucson, Arizona 85721
(602) 621-3299

Dr. Ronald Miros, State Coordinator
Services for the Severely
Emotionally Disturbed
1405 North Pierce, Suite 101
Little Rock, Arkansas 72207
(501) 663-3835

Ms. Kathleen Balkman, Director
of the Arkansas Special
Education Resource Center
1405 North Pierce, Suite 101
Little Rock, Arkansas 72207
(501) 663-3835

Maureen Bradshaw, SED Consultant
Arch Ford Educational Service
Route 1, Box
Plumberville, Arkansas 72127
(501) 354-2269

Mr. Ed Bradshaw, Principal
Volinia Elementary School
P.O. Box 160
Volinia, Arkansas 72173
(501) 796-2112

This paper describes the sequence of events followed by the Arkansas Department of Education and 55 local educational agencies to implement Teacher Assistance Teams (TAT) throughout the state of Arkansas over a three year period. This project represents the effective blending of Federal, State, local and University consultants and resources. It is hoped the ideas and information shared in this paper will be helpful to other educators serving students in rural areas.

PHASE ONE: Planning

The Arkansas three year action plan was initiated when Dr. Margaret Van Dusen Pysh, an Illinois school administrator and Dr. James C. Chalfant, University of Arizona professor, were invited to speak to the Arkansas Department of Education about the implications and benefits of establishing their Teacher Assistance Team Model in Arkansas schools (Chalfant & Pysh, 1981, 1989; Chalfant, Pysh & Moultrie, 1979). Following their presentation, the Arkansas Department of Education (ADE) determined that the presence of such teams offered several potential benefits to Arkansas such as: providing a support and collaboration system for teachers; serving as a preventive measure for "at-risk" students and for assisting in mainstreaming special education students; addressing discipline problems in schools; empowering teachers through new perceptions, skills, and behaviors; enhancing building morale; producing changes in teachers' perceptions, skills, and inter-personal behaviors; and reducing referral rates and cost.

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After establishing the need and selecting the Teacher Assistance Team model to help meet those needs, a three year action model was developed and support and resources were committed to implement the plan.

PHASE TWO: Obtaining Administrative Support

Administrative support for teams is a critical factor in their development. Arkansas Department of Education support consisted of allocating Title VI-D Federal grant monies funding consultant costs for training and school districts' expenses for travel and meals for four team members for the one day training and one day follow-up session. Additionally, personnel from the Arkansas Special Education Resource Center (ASERC) were identified to coordinate TAT, conduct on site orientations and regional team network meetings.

The following commitments were required from the local level administrators. Before training, the Superintendent of each school district agreed in writing to:

1. Scheduling an orientation with the building site faculty
2. Providing release time for three (3) team members and the principal for two (2) days:
    a) training - 1 day (October)
    b) follow-up - 1 day (spring)
3. Funding substitutes for team members to attend training and follow-up
4. Providing additional release time of two (2) half days for team leaders to network
5. Funding substitutes and travel for team leaders to attend network meetings for two (2) half days
6. Allowing the building principal to adjust schedules for team members to meet
7. Providing evaluation data to determine the effectiveness of the teams including:
    a) a summary of students served
    b) the number of objectives attempted and achieved
    c) the number of students referred to special education and placed or found to be eligible after going through TAT

PHASE THREE: Training Pilot Site Teams

Awareness sessions were conducted with local district administrators by ADE and ASERC personnel to discuss how to determine the need for a TAT team in their schools. Faculty orientations were held in schools where administrators perceived a need. Schools whose faculty were interested in the model were asked to make the commitments described above. Initially, school

districts with an identified overrepresentation of minority students in special education were specifically invited by the Arkansas Department of Education to attend the first training session; six pilot school districts accepted.

Drs. Pysh and Chalfant trained the schools in the TAT model: six teams in the fall of 1988; nineteen teams in the fall of 1989; and 33 teams in the fall of 1990. Some districts trained additional teams or trained several teams. As of Fall 1990, out of 61 teams trained, 55 were operating and only six districts which were trained did not have teams in operation. Four of these districts were districts which were encouraged to attend the training to address their problems. The other districts were self-selected with voluntary, initial administrative support and commitment before training.

The initial Pysh and Chalfant training consisted of the following content:

1. Describing student behavior and classroom situations
2. Analyzing and conceptualizing student needs
3. Applying communication/collaboration principles
4. Negotiating and writing goals
5. Conducting efficient and effective problem solving meetings
6. Brainstorming strategies
7. Measuring student progress
8. Providing on-going follow-up
9. Planning and development activities

PHASE FOUR: Implementing Teams

Following the training, the team members elected in each school developed their organizational, operational, and documentation procedures. This included: determining the mission or purpose of the team and establishing operational and practical procedures for:

1. Pre-meeting activities
2. Conducting meetings
3. Systematic follow-up, and
4. Forms to be used

Teams field tested their procedures on one case, revised procedures or forms as necessary and then began serving the teachers' needs in their school.

PHASE FIVE: Technical Assistance Network

In order to assist teams in resolving their problems, a TAT coordinator was employed through ASERC. Nine existing consultants for students with serious emotional disturbances were also utilized

to provide technical assistance to the teams and guide networking within their respective six regions. Each SED consultant was assigned the following responsibilities:

August	present faculty overview when scheduled
October	participate in TAT training with implementing teams
October	participate in technical assistance meetings with State project consultants (Drs. Pysh and Chalfant)
October-early November	visit each site a minimum of two (2) times to assist in developing team procedures and getting the team ready for implementation of the model
December	Network meeting with team leaders
January	visit each site and provide technical assistance
February	Network meeting with team leaders visit each site - and provide technical assistance
March	follow-up meeting with State project consultants (Drs. Pysh and Chalfant)
May	visit each site, collect evaluation data
June	submit data to ASERC by June 15
-	keep minutes at network meetings for possible dissemination, a copy of the minutes should be submitted to ASERC five (5) days . after the network meeting

The TAT teams or leaders from each team met and networked regionally with their SED consultants. They discussed their successes and identifed the problems they had encountered, shared solutions or attempted together to seek alternatives to handle these problems. Teams often had encountered similar problems and it was not uncommon for one of the teams to have discovered a solution to the problem which could be shared with teams who had not yet resolved the problem.

PHASE SIX: Follow-up Training

After approximately six to nine months of operation, follow-up training was provided for teams by Drs. Pysh and Chalfant, the State project consultants. This training was designed to respond to the stated needs of the team members obtained in a survey. The typical follow-up training consisted of the following content:

1. Organizational Issues
   - Time Management
   - Paperwork
   - Team Structure
2. Staff Attitudes and Reluctance
3. Membership Issues
4. Incentive Issues
5. Follow-up
6. Idea Generation and Resource Acquistion
7. Evaluation
8. Communication/Collaboration Skills

PHASE SEVEN: Advanced Training

After a year or two of experience, teams were ready for advanced training. This third level of training was directed toward specific content areas identified by experienced teams. Advanced training was intended to provide more in-depth knowledge and skills in working with teachers and students. Typical advanced training includes such content as:

A. Specific intervention strategies for improving students:
   - self esteem
   - work habits
   - conduct/behavior problems
   - academic content skills

B. Group dynamics
   - consultation/collaboration skills
   - communication skills

C. Responding effectively to resistant, interfering teacher beliefs

D. Measuring student progress

E. Team sharing and exchange

EVALUATION

An effort was made to survey the participating teams in Spring, 1990 to obtain information about the extent of their efforts and their effectiveness. Teams reported serving 1,393 students with some schools designing school-wide strategies. Only 13 students were referred to special education for testing and six of those students were declared eligible for special education services. The survey questions were not as clearly written as they needed to be so the data describing the number of students helped by the teams and the extent of the resolution of their problems was considered unclear and is, therefore, not being reported.

The network meetings were reported to be very beneficial. On a five point rating scale, teams judged network meetings as beneficial in four areas:

the process of TAT (4.4)

sharing ideas (4.9)
additional intervention strategies (4.2)
developing support systems (3.3)
sharing classroom strategies (3.9)

In November 1990, a new Data Collection Manual was created by the ASERC to obtain information which will more accurately describe the impact of the Teacher Assistance Teams on teachers and students as well as describe the continued activities and development of the teams.

Preliminary effectiveness data collected in Fall, 1990, showed 19 teams reporting 88 problems brought to teams between August and December of 1990. Of these, 12 problems were building related, ie. facilities, scheduling, etc.; 76 problems were student related with classroom/interpersonal behaviors representing 45% or 34 of the problems discussed. Academics was the second most common student problem accounting for 16 or 21% of the problems. Of the 69 student cases reporting demographics, the cases fell into the following race and age categories:

Racial Breakdown of TAT Cases

56 or 81% White
12 or 18% Black
1 or 1% Asian

Ages of Students handled by TAT

5 - 6 yrs. - 11
7 - 8 yrs. - 16
9 - 10 yrs. - 19
11 - 12 yrs. - 6
13 - 14 yrs. - 9
15 - 16 yrs. - 7

Of the 77 cases on which outcome data was reported:

23 or 30% were successfully resolved.

30 or 40% were partially resolved.

11 or 14% were partially resolved and referred to special education.

8 or 10% were partially resolved and referred to another resource.

4 or 5% were referred directly to special education.

1 or 1% was referred directly to another resource.

CONCLUSIONS

The results of our Arkansas experience reinforce previous research that Teacher Assistance Teams can support and enhance the collaboration and empowerment of teachers, address student and school-wide problems, provide preventive intervention for "at risk" students, and identify appropriate referrals to special education (Chalfant & Pysh, 1981, 1989; Chalfant, Pysh & Moultrie, 1979; Hayek, 1987).

For successful implementation, participation of schools must be voluntary. Administrators and teachers should not be pressured to establish teams. The principal is a critical factor in initiating and maintaining teams. Some teams were discontinued when a new principal joined the building. When a new principal enters a building with an existing team, efforts must be made immediately to familiarize the new principal with the model. Principals can then decide based upon sufficient information whether or not they wish to continue a TAT team in their building. A high percentage of teams encouraged to adopt the model did not follow-through presumably because they did not perceive a need for a team.

Systematic initial and follow-up training is essential. Initial training is most effective if conducted in late September or October. Mid-year training is not as beneficial since less time is available to establish teams.

Another critical factor in creating team success is on-going support and contact after training. Immediately following the training, contact must be established with teams to support their efforts and advise them during the first critical weeks/months in developing their team. Implementation is enhanced significantly by a network of teams coordinated with State resource personnel.

A simple and easily understood evaluation plan is essential to provide data for determining team effectiveness and to build a case for future administrative support to maintain effective teams.

Establishing and maintaining effective teams requires a minimum three year plan of: voluntary local administrative and building principal commitment; thorough initial and follow-up training; a system for team support and networking; and an evaluation system which provides useful data for measuring team effectiveness and efficiency, and provides information for future planning.

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